

WAC 458-20-115 Sales of packing materials and containers. (1) Introduction. This section explains the B&O, retail sales, and use taxes which apply to persons who sell packing materials and to those who use packing materials.

(2) Definitions. The term "packing materials" means and includes all boxes, crates, bottles, cans, bags, drums, cartons, wrapping papers, cellophane, twines, gummed tapes, wire, bands, excelsior, waste paper, and all other materials in which tangible personal property may be contained or protected within a container, for transportation or delivery to a purchaser.

(3) Business and occupation tax.

(a) Sales of packing materials to persons who sell tangible personal property contained therein or protected thereby are sales for resale and subject to tax under the wholesaling classification. Sellers must obtain resale certificates from the purchaser to support that these sales are for resale. Refer to WAC 458-20-102.

(b) Sales of containers to persons who sell tangible personal property therein, but who retain title to such containers which are to be returned, are sales for consumption and subject to tax under the retailing classification. This class includes wooden or metal bottle cases, barrels, gas tanks, carboys, drums, bags and other items, when title thereto remains in the seller of the tangible personal property contained therein, and even though a deposit is not made for the containers, and when such articles are customarily returned to the seller. If a charge is made against a customer for the container, with the understanding that such charge will be cancelled or rebated when the container is returned, the amount charged is deemed to be made as security for the return of the container and is not part of the selling price for tax purposes. However, refer to the comments below for sales of containers for beverages and foods.

(c) Title to containers, whether designated as returnable or nonreturnable, for beverages and food sold at retail, including beer, milk, soft drinks, mixers and the like, will be deemed to pass to the customer along with the contents. In such cases, amounts charged for the containers are part of the selling price of the food or beverage and subject to retailing tax when sold to consumers. Sales to persons who will resell the food or beverages are wholesale sales.

(d) Persons who perform custom or commercial packing for others are generally taxable under the service B&O tax classification on the income from the packing activity.

(i) Under RCW 82.04.190, persons taxable under the service B&O tax classification are consumers of any materials used in performing the service. Sales of packing materials to persons engaged in the business of custom or commercial packing are sales for consumption and are subject to the retail sales tax. However, there is a specific statutory exemption from the B&O tax for persons who perform packing of fresh perishable horticultural products for the grower. These persons are also exempt from retail sales tax on the purchase of any materials and supplies used in performing the packing service.

(ii) Persons who perform custom or commercial packing for others and who also manufacture the boxes, containers, or other packaging materials used by them in the packing are subject to the manufacturing tax and use tax on the value of the packing materials which they manufacture. Refer to WAC 458-20-136.

(e) Persons who operate cold storage warehouses or who perform processing for hire for others, which includes packaging the processed items, are not the consumers of the containers or other packaging materials. Sales of boxes, cartons, and packaging materials to these persons are taxable under the wholesaling tax classification. Refer to WAC 458-20-136 and 458-20-133.

(f) Persons who manufacture packing materials for delivery outside Washington or for their own commercial or industrial use are manufacturers and should refer to WAC 458-20-136, 458-20-134, and 458-20-112.

(4) Retail sales tax.

(a) All sales taxable under the retailing classification of the business and occupation tax as indicated above are also subject to retail sales tax except those specifically distinguished hereafter in this subsection.

(b) Retail sales tax does not apply to sales of returnable food and beverage containers, and vendors may take a deduction from gross retail sales for the amount of such sales in reporting sales tax due, providing (i) the seller separately states the charge for the container and (ii) the separately stated charge is the amount the vendor will pay for a repurchase of the container. Return of the containers is a repurchase by the vendor, and sales tax is not due on amounts paid to the customer on such repurchases, since the vendor will resell the containers in the regular course of business. (RCW 82.08.0282.)

(c) No deduction is allowed in computing tax under the retail sales tax classification where the retail sales tax is collected from the customer upon the charge for the container.

(d) Sales of packing materials to cooperative marketing associations, agents, or independent contractors for the purpose of packing fresh perishable horticultural products for the growers thereof, are not subject to retail sales tax. See also WAC 458-20-214.

(5) Use tax.

(a) The use tax applies to uses of packing materials and containers to which retail sales tax would apply but, for any reason, was not paid at the time such materials and containers were acquired.

(b) The use tax applies to the use of packing materials, such as boxes, cartons, and strapping materials, by a manufacturer in Washington where the packing materials are used to protect materials while being transported to another site of the manufacturer for further processing.

(c) The use tax applies to the use of pallets by a manufacturer or seller where the pallets will not be sold with the product, but are for use in the manufacturing plant or warehouse.

(6) Examples. The following examples identify a number of facts and then state a conclusion. These examples should be used only as a general guide. The tax status of each situation must be determined after a review of all of the facts and circumstances.

(a) ABC Packing Co. does custom packing of small parts for a Washington manufacturer. The parts are sent by truck to ABC who then places the parts into plastic bags and seals the bags through a heat fusion process. ABC is the consumer of the bags and must pay either retail sales tax or use tax on the use of the bags. This is true even though the bags will remain with the parts until delivered to the ultimate user of the parts.

(b) XY manufactures paper products in Washington. The paper is placed on large rolls. These large rolls are shipped to another of its own plants where the paper goes through a slitter for conversion into reams of paper. These large rolls involve the use of "cores" made of heavy fiber board on which the paper is rolled. "Plugs" are placed in the ends to give additional support. The rolls are also wrapped and banded with steel banding. The cores, plugs, wrapping materials, and banding are all eventually removed during the additional processing. XY is the consumer of the plugs, cores, and other packing materials and must pay retail sales or use tax on these items.

(c) XY uses three types of pallets in its manufacturing operation. One type of pallet is used strictly for storing paper which is in the manufacturing process. A second type of pallet is returnable and the customer is charged a deposit which is refunded at the time the pallet is returned. The third type of pallet is nonreturnable and is sold with the product. XY is required to pay retail sales or use tax on the first two types of pallets. The third type of pallets may be purchased by XY without the payment of retail sales or use tax since these pallets are sold with the paper products.

(d) Cold Storage Co. does custom fish processing for various customers. The processing involves cutting whole fish into fillets or steaks, vacuum packaging the pieces, and freezing the packages. The packing activity is considered to be part of a processing for hire activity. As a processor for hire, Cold Storage Co. is not the consumer of the packing materials. (Statutory Authority: RCW 82.32.300. 93-19-017, ' 458-20-115, filed 9/2/93, effective 10/3/93; 88-20-014 (Order 88-6), ' 458-20-115, filed 9/27/88; Order 74-2, ' 458-20-115, filed 6/24/74; Order ET 70-3, ' 458-20-115 (Rule 115), filed 5/29/70, effective 7/1/70.)